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THE MUSICAL TIMES, And Singing Class Circular.

JULY 1st, 1862.

THE GREAT HANDEL FESTIVAL AT THE CRYSTAL PALACE.

THE Handel Festival at the Crystal Palace has now become established as the great musical event to which all professional musicians, as well as amateurs, look forward with the greatest interest. Large bodies of singers are occasionally brought together, both at home and abroad, when great effects are produced; but they all sink into insignificance when compared with this immense gathering, which will now become a Triennial Festival. When the first of these meetings was projected in 1857, doubts and surmises of every description were hazarded as to the possibility of bringing together so vast a concourse of performers, and as to keeping them in any kind of controul when united, but through the untiring energy of those who have had the management, every difficulty has been overcome, and the last improvement—that of adding a dome, or sounding-board to the orchestra—has dissipated all obstacles, and we may now congratulate ourselves upon having the finest building, and the best disciplined choir for the purpose that has ever been projected. We are informed by the notices already issued, giving the dimensions of the building, that the great orchestra, prepared for the performance in 1857, held only about 2500 individuals; that it was, in fact, a mere amphitheatre, open at the sides, back, and roof, and wholly incapable of retaining the body of sound as it was generated. In 1859 the capacity of the orchestra was enlarged, and an oiled awning thrown across it; but this year it has been entirely enclosed, and in place of the canvass ceiling, a substantial roof or huge sounding-board has been added, springing from the walls and back, which also are solid and permanent. The span of the procenium is 216 feet, double the diameter of the dome of St. Paul's, and almost equal to that of the great dome of the Exhibition building and Exeter Hall combined; while it is nearly as deep from front to back as Exeter Hall itself. These facts give some notion of this colossal enclosure, and of the prestige it has excited as a structure for musical performances. The decorations have been supplied in excellent taste. The neutral tone of the prevailing colour, relieved by the poly-chromic medallions and arabesques which define the outline of the arch; the band that lines the interior, upon which is recorded the works of Handel; the pictorial centre-piece supplied by the stupendous and elaborately-embellished organ, and the thick foreground of plants and flowers, make up a tableau of magnificence, the effect of which is astonishing. It will be interesting to record the

numerical strength of the orchestra, which is as follows:—The entire choral force amounted to 3120; of these the trebles numbered 810, the altos 810, the tenors 750, and the basses 750; a considerable advancement upon the previous choirs. The band reached 505. So that the combined executants included a grand total of 3635, exclusive of librarians, stewards, and other officers, which would swell the numbers to 4000, being 1985 above the grand musical array assembled in the orchestra at the Crystal Palace, on its inauguration in 1854. That orchestra was looked upon with wonder, and it was little imagined that in so short a time it would be necessary to more than double the numbers. The chief object of interest this year has been the effect of the new sounding-board; and we need only repeat the universal opinion, that it is in every respect a magnificent success. The vocal parts are now defined as completely as if they were delivered at Exeter Hall; and the fugued passages and points are brought out with clearness and decision. Some of the choruses are no doubt heard with better effect than others; but the foggiess and obscurity incident to the manifestations of the former festivals are wholly got rid of. The sound is wonderfully amplified, and there is an extraordinary richness in the tone, without any perceptible resonance. Whether from the alterations in the building, or from the improved selection of the singers, this is quite certain, that the sound of the voices is considerably brightened. It is difficult to give praise to one class of singers over another where all are so good. The trebles were brilliant and strong, and asserted their right to be most prominent, though an occasional unsteadiness might be perceived among them. The altos were rendered more telling by the introduction of male voices. The points were invariably taken up by them with certainty and precision. The tenors did their work in a masterly style; and the basses, though rather given to drag the time, were ponderous and massive. In speaking of the performances, we must place the rehearsal of Saturday in equal rank with the other three days, for so perfect an execution of the music, taken altogether, could not have been excelled; and it is really wonderful that so large a chorus should have been collected from all quarters, who could sing the music with so few mistakes. The result of the whole may fairly be pronounced a complete triumph.

The rehearsal began three quarters of an hour later than was intended, owing to the non-arrival of many of the performers, who were unreasonably delayed by the want of efficient management on the part of the railway. Those who had anticipated a more easy journey from the Victoria station were much disappointed, and thousands were kept standing in the crowd for an hour at a time before they could obtain any conveyance; at London Bridge matters were quite as bad, which was very disgraceful, considering that the

company had received such ample notice of the accommodation required. The arrangements at the Crystal Palace were in all respects satisfactory; and the ease with which the 20,000 persons who were present were able to move about could only have proceeded from special care and precaution taken beforehand. Long before all the performers had taken their places, Mr. Costa lifted his bâton, and the National Anthem was sung, which was received with overwhelming acclamation, as it tested at once the improved sound produced from the new orchestra. After this the three grand choruses from the *Messiah*, "For unto us," and the "Hallelujah" and "Amen," were performed in a manner which proved the inimitable quality and efficiency of the singers. The audience were well able to judge of these familiar pieces, and without a dissentient voice they were pronounced to excel everything that had been before heard. Mdme. Sainton then sung "Return, O God of Hosts," and her full rich voice was never heard to greater perfection. Each note was distinctly audible at the farthest extremity of the building, and it was evident that solo singers would no longer require to shout their loudest to make themselves audible in the Crystal Palace.

The music which followed was chiefly taken from the Selection programme of Wednesday, including several choruses from *Solomon*; "Wretched Lovers," from *Acis and Galatea*; and "See the conquering Hero comes." Several solos were introduced for the gratification of the audience. The first was "Let the bright Seraphim," sung by Mdle. Titien in admirable style; "Revenge, Timotheus cries," by Sig. Belletti; and "Love in her eyes," by Mr. S. Reeves. The Rehearsal concluded with a short selection from *Israel in Egypt*, comprising the choruses, "He spake the word;" "He gave them hailstones;" and "He sent a thick darkness;" and the duet, "The Lord is a man of war," in which Sig. Belletti and Mr. Weiss produced great effect. It will thus be seen that the music of Saturday was highly interesting, including as it did the most popular pieces, and certainly a more satisfactory rehearsal could not have taken place.

Monday.—The Festival was inaugurated on Monday morning in the most brilliant manner by the performance of the *Messiah*. As the oratorio was commenced at one o'clock, there was more time for the conveyance of the singers and audience, and consequently less pressure at the railway stations, and between 15,000 and 16,000 persons were comfortably seated soon after the performance had begun. There was a visible improvement in the general appearance of the visitors, who displayed more attention to dress than on Saturday, and this difference was observable in the orchestra as well as in other parts of the building. The ladies, without having strictly attended to the directions as to wearing

white or light dresses, were sufficiently mindful of effect to produce a goodly display of every color in the rainbow. Among the audience the white neckcloths of the clergy were most observable, even bishops might have been seen in the crowd, who evidently considered that the performance of the *Messiah* was sufficient to sanctify any public building. The oratorio was preceded by the National Anthem, the verses of which were sung by the chorus without any solos, a very judicious arrangement, for it would hardly have been fair to place any soprano in the invidious position of competing with Mdme. Clara Novello, whose singing of the National Anthem was at all times a great feature in the performance. The soprano solos in the first part of the oratorio were taken by Mdme. Parepa, and in the second by Mdle. Titien. The bass music was also divided between Sig. Belletti and Mr. Weiss; but the tenor and contralto parts were solely in the hands of Mr. S. Reeves and Mdme. Sainton. In all but the soprano music the singers were the accredited favorites of the public; but Mdme. Parepa and Mdle. Titien had a more difficult task to perform, since a comparison between the singers of this year and that greatest of all sopranis, whose like we shall not probably soon see again, could not fail to arise in the minds of all. Mdle. Parepa's voice is no doubt very clear and penetrating, and may be heard at a great distance; but the want of firmness in her tone, arising probably from having too much forced her voice, will prevent her from ever acquiring that smooth and even quality so indispensable for sacred music. In other respects, however, her singing was artistic and praiseworthy, and she sang with much taste and expression. The propriety of introducing a high sustained note on the word "rest" at the conclusion of "He shall feed his flock," may be questioned. It was, no doubt, done for effect, and that object was gained, for the audience, ever ready to praise high and loud tones, applauded vehemently. Her execution of "Rejoice greatly," was brilliant in the extreme, and was evidently well suited to her style and her compass. It was impossible to have two voices so completely different as Mdle. Parepa's and Mdle. Titien's. The rich and clear voice of the latter penetrates to the farthest points, and the perfect mellowness of the tone, even when exerted to the utmost, renders it impossible that the highest and strongest notes can ever become harsh or shrill. This lady is now without doubt the vocalist *par excellence* for a festival. It was in the solo, "I know that my Redeemer liveth," that she shone out most triumphantly, all her best energies were then concentrated, and a truly glorious result was produced.

Mr. Sims Reeves' delivery of the tenor solos in this oratorio is too well known to need comment, it is sufficient to say that he excelled himself on this occasion, his voice was firmer and

stronger, and his energy greater than ever. The recitatives were given with that perfection of just expression for which he is so much famed, and nothing could exceed the exquisite pathos with which he sung the recitative, "Thy rebuke hath broken his heart," and the air, "Behold, and see if there be any sorrow." Madame Sainton is another exponent of Handel's music, on whom it is impossible to bestow too great praise. To her the new sounding-board was of immense advantage, as it enabled her voice to be heard with much greater ease. All low voices, both contralto and bass, are evidently placed at a disadvantage in this building, and they must trust more to artistic evenness of tone and smooth firm singing, than to noise. Mr. Weiss, in the grand bass air, "Why do the nations," produced an immense effect; his magnificent voice and prodigious energy qualify him to be considered the best interpreter of sacred music of this class. Signor Belletti sang "The people that walked in darkness" in a very creditable manner. It is at no time a favourite song with the audience, and the singer seldom receives the amount of applause he deserves, from the many difficulties which have to be overcome. The choruses went off to perfection; all were well sung, but the "Hallelujah" was beyond everything effective. In that was distinguishable, more than in any of the others, the immense volume of sound produced. "For unto us" was not less successful; and it was worth all the trouble and expense of going to the Palace to hear these two choruses sung. "Lift up your heads" would have been more effective if proper attention had been paid to the division of the soprano voices. In this chorus there is a second soprano part, which was quite inaudible. A general evenness of tone was observable throughout the choruses; the points were taken up with singular correctness. Upon the whole, it is impossible to compare any previous performance of the *Messiah* with that of Monday, at the Crystal Palace.

Wednesday.—This day was devoted to a selection of music, taken from the works of Handel, some of which were quite new to the public. The programme generally contained pieces of considerable interest, and there were probably more musicians collected together to hear this day's performance than either the *Messiah* or *Israel in Egypt*. The blocks of seats in the transept were not filled up till long after the commencement of the music, arising, probably, from railway delays; and the accounts from the Victoria station were by no means satisfactory. The first piece in the day's selection was "We praise thee, O God," the introductory chorus from the *Dettingen Te Deum*. It was in all respects a most appropriate commencement to the selection, and was sung well and steadily throughout, though the weakness of the soprano was most observable. This arose, no doubt, from the fact that the voices were divided into first

and second soprani; consequently, there could have been but 400 voices to sing the melody, as against 750 tenors, and 750 basses. Surely if it is necessary to have 800 soprani in a four-part chorus, it must be necessary to have a greater number than 400 for the melody of a five-part chorus. This was followed by the second chorus from the *Dettingen*, "All the earth doth worship thee," and a more perfect execution of the music could not have been heard, always excepting again the division of the soprano voices, and this was the more observable here on account of the two upper parts running very much in thirds. "Return, O God of Hosts," from *Samson*, stood No. 3 upon the programme, and was sung by Madame Sainton, who was quite as successful as on the Saturday; her singing was the perfection of the smooth, unimpassioned style so well adapted to devotional music. The chorus "To dust his glory," followed, with contralto obbligato. It was now Mdlle. Titiens' turn to shew off her powers in "Let the bright seraphim," with trumpet obbligato, Mr. Harper. As far as the sound of her voice went, nothing could be more beautiful; it was full, rich, and melodious, but, unfortunately, the shake at the termination was not such an *ensemble* as could have been desired; with this exception it was an admirable performance, and received an almost unanimous encore. The next piece was the chorus, "Let their celestial concerts all unite," from *Samson*, and this was the least successful of the entire selection; the florid passages continually taken up by each voice sounded in the distance a complete scramble. It was not, however, the fault of the singers, but of the peculiar nature of the music. "Honour and arms," by Sig. Belletti, was very much applauded; the rapid baritone passages were executed with singular neatness and precision; his voice, however, has not sufficient volume to produce any great effect in so large a building. The chorus from *Judas Maccabæus*, "Grant a leader bold and brave," was one of the best pieces in the selection, and being known familiarly by all the singers, it was given with that certainty which comes by repeated practice. Mr. Sims Reeves was never in better voice, and never exerted himself to more purpose than in his "Sound an alarm." It was enough to excite the warlike spirit of the whole audience, and few could resist such an appeal to their martial ardour. The responsive "We hear," comes as a matter of course from his followers, and bears the stamp of reality. The charming chorus, "Envy, eldest born of hell," was particularly pleasing. It is short, but exquisitely beautiful. "The "Dead March" was played by the band in good style, and this was followed by the chorus "As from the power of sacred lays," in which Mdlle. Titiens took the short intermediate solos. Her voice up to the last line was all that could be desired, and reminded us of her predecessor in

this part, but the concluding five bars, all upon the high A, spoiled the delusion, for she was unable to sustain the note beyond one half of its length, which seriously injured the effect of the passage. The concluding chorus of the first part, "The dead shall live," taken from *St. Cecilia's Day*, was admirably sung, and was an effective finale.

The second part commenced with a chorus from *Hercules*, entitled "Tyrants now no more shall dread," a piece quite new to most of the audience. It is vigorous and grand throughout, and the progressions are so well defined and the harmonies so rich that it would be difficult to find a chorus more attractive or more worthy of performance. It is a great pity that this music, and the *Ode to St. Cecilia's Day*, should not be oftener heard and better known. Sig. Belletti sang "Revenge, Timotheus cries," with judgment and discretion; and this was followed by the chorus from *Solomon*, "May no rash intruder," which was so pleasing that it commanded an encore, the result of which was that an improvement took place in the execution of the music, and the mistake on the first performance was rectified. Madame Sherrington now made her appearance for the first time, and sang "Hush ye pretty warbling choir," from *Acis and Galatea*. The music is well adapted to her light and flexible voice, which was like the warbling of a bird, and her execution was perfect. The tenor air from the same work is a very beautiful composition, and was sung most charmingly by Mr. S. Reeves, but it is almost too delicate a composition for the rude ordeal of a monster performance. The next selection from *Acis and Galatea* was the "Polyphemus Chorus," which was effective, though by no means well sung; the principal defect being among the tenors, who in this five-part chorus are divided into first and second voices, and their notes were exceedingly weak and ineffectual. This part was wound up by the laughing solo and chorus "Haste thee, nymph," from *L'Allegro*. Mr. Weiss had kindly undertaken to sing the short solo, which was too high for his voice, but he made up with comic vigour for any little deficiency of compass. The male chorus acted well up to their parts in the following joyful sounds, but the ladies were deficient in the *vis comica*, and their laugh gave one no idea that they were any of them holding both their sides. It was now half-past three, and no wonder if they required something substantial to support them; it was no laughing matter to sing for two hours and a half without nourishment.

The third part commenced with the Overture to *Samson*, followed by the double chorus "Immortal Lord," from *Deborah*. This, and the double choruses from *Solomon*, "From the censer curling rise," "Shake the dome," and "Praise the Lord with harp and tongue," were by far the grandest performances of the day. For the third

part the singers had been divided into two bodies, so as to have a separate chorus on each side of the orchestra, and the effect produced was grand beyond conception. When all joined in these massive and stupendous choruses, nothing could be more sublime. The remaining pieces of the Selection were "Music spread thy voice around," "Draw the tear," and "O had I Jubal's lyre," concluding with the favourite chorus "See the conquering hero comes," which, with the whole power of the band and chorus combined, brought the day's performance to a most satisfactory conclusion.

The whole of the music comprised in this day's programme was published by Messrs. Novello and Co., and was used very generally by the audience, who seemed to be of opinion that the pleasure of such a performance was much increased by having a handbook of the music. It may be added, that this varied selection, chosen as it was by the most competent judges of effect, from among the best compositions of the great Master, would be well adapted to performance by choral societies throughout the country.

It is but justice to the principal persons connected with this Festival, to give them the highest praise for the manner in which the entire arrangements were carried out; and more particularly Mr. Bowley, in whom the idea of the Handel Festivals originated. To his untiring zeal and ability as a manager may be attributed the success of the undertaking. The whole body of ladies and gentlemen forming the orchestra, who at no inconsiderable expense and loss of time have assisted so ably in the performance of the music, deserve the sincere thanks of the public, for without their voluntary aid so costly an entertainment could never be made remunerative.

Friday.—It is not in our power to give any account of this day's performances, in consequence of its being our publishing day; but we may chronicle the fact, that the programme contained the whole of the oratorio, *Israel in Egypt*, with the following solo singers:—Mdlle. Titiens, Madame Rudersdorff, Madame Sainton Dolby, Mr. S. Reeves, Signor Belletti, and Mr. Weiss.

It was expected that this would prove the most important day of the Festival, as it comprised the oratorio by far the best adapted to a monster orchestra. It was arranged that the singers should be divided, so as to form a complete chorus on each side of the organ, in order to perform, with the greatest effect, the stupendous double choruses running through this magnificent oratorio.

TO CORRESPONDENTS.

CONSCIENCE MONEY.—Received 1s. 6d., being the amount which ought to have been paid for music purchased from us some time since, upon a false representation that it was obtained for a professional musician.